

Bighorn National Forest

2019 Annual Report



A LITTLE BIT OF HISTORY

The area that is known today as the Bighorn National Forest was set aside in 1897 as the Big Horn Forest Reserve. In 1907, the name was changed to the Bighorn National Forest. It is named for the Bighorn River, which flows along the west side of the forest. The river was first named by American Indians for the great herds of bighorn sheep at the river's mouth. Lewis and Clark transferred the name to the mountain range in the early 1800's.

Humans have inhabited the Bighorns for thousands of years. Indigenous people used the area for traditional cultural practices and subsistence living. Mountain men hunted, trapped, and traded on these lands.

Historical uses resonate today in the rich culture of the area, including ranching, logging, and professional outfitters and guides. Lodges and resorts provide fishing, hunting, and recreation services to the public.

The Bighorn National Forest provides recreation opportunities for camping, fishing, hunting, viewing wildlife and scenery, and motorized and non-motorized trail enthusiasts. In addition to a wide range of recreation opportunities and abundant wildlife populations, the Bighorn hosts activities such as grazing and logging, all of which help support the economies of local communities. In the past two decades, forest management has focused on minimizing fire risk to communities and municipal drinking water supplies.



FOREST FACTS

General

Forest land area	1,115,161 acres
Land types	About 60 percent forested About 40 percent shrub, meadow, or rock
Average annual budget	\$8 million
Elevations	Lowest—5,500 feet Highest—Cloud Peak at 13,175 feet
Special areas and designations	Cloud Peak Wilderness—189,000 acres Rock Creek recommended wilderness—33,850 acres Bucking Mule Falls National Recreation Trail Four research natural areas—6,400 acres Three scenic byways Medicine Wheel/Medicine Mountain National Historic Landmark



Goods and services

Grants and Agreements with counties (mostly Weed and Pest agreements)	Big Horn \$30,000 Johnson \$10,699 Sheridan \$20,000 (an additional \$100,000 was awarded from the Washington Office State & Private Forestry Grant for an Emerging Pests grant)
Commercial livestock grazing	74 active allotments on 874,275 acres 70 term grazing permits Animal unit months permitted 90,006 Animal unit months authorized 75,736

Resources and vegetation management

Forest management and timber	Timber volume sold 17,903 Ccf Vegetation improved 670 acres Forest regeneration 876 acres
Other forest products	3,256 cords firewood 316 Ccf post and pole 2,584 Christmas tree permits

Fire and fuels management

Staffing	Three engines, Black Tooth Fire Module, and Wyoming Interagency Hotshots
Hazardous fuels reduction	Approximately 3,500 acres
Wildland fire history (1910 through 2015)	Average fires per year 16 (47 percent lightning, 53 percent human caused) Average acres per year 1,195 Largest wildfire Bone Creek 13,450 acres in 2007



All-Employee Work Day at Porcupine Ranger Station

Among other accomplishments, a cabin and outhouse were repainted, the barracks' shutters were repaired, trees were removed from fences and the fences were repaired, the bone yard was cleaned and better organized, and an enclosure was decommissioned. While taking care of maintenance needs and other necessary work, we also built stronger inter-employee relationships and were given the chance to meet new people and work with those from other corners of the forest.



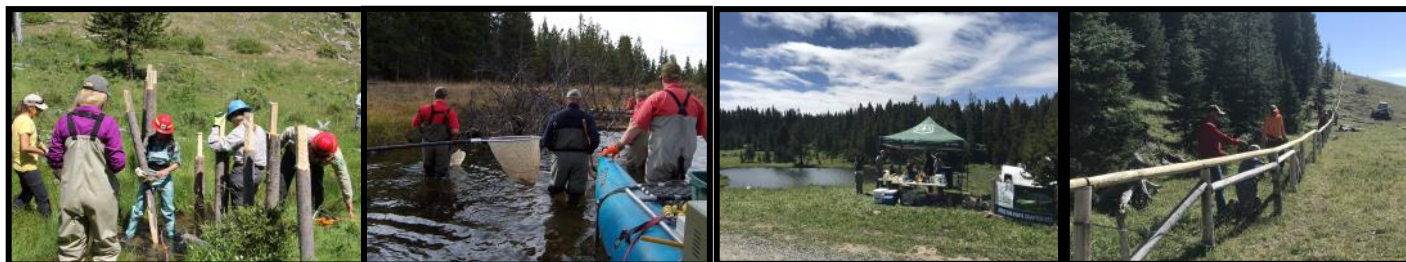
Over 75 employees worked together to accomplish facility maintenance July 2, 2019

Beaver Dam Analogs and More

Beaver dam analogs were installed in multiple locations on the Powder River Ranger District. The project was completed in partnership with the Wyoming Game and Fish Department (WY G&F), and multiple resource crews on the forest including wildlife, trails, recreation, aquatics, information services, range and fire crews. Beaver dam analogs are structures built to promote riparian vegetation growth and create appealing habitat for beavers will be transplanted by the WY G&F in and build a natural dam. The structures are built of native posts set in the ground with willows woven through the posts to create semi-permeable barriers that partially backup the small streams. The idea is the flooded streams will be more attractive to beavers and increase riparian vegetation growth.

Other projects in the aquatics program, included the Soldier Creek Fence project, which involved WY G&F, Trout Unlimited, and aquatics and range crews. Buckskin Ed Creek Rotenone treatment was completed through a partnership with the WY G&F, aquatic crews and other Forest Service personnel. This project included doing a second round of treatment on Buckskin Ed for future Yellowstone Cutthroat Trout (YTC) reintroduction. Fish shocking and surveying with the WY G&F was also completed on the North Tongue and South Tongue Rivers. The Forest Service partnered with Trout Unlimited and WY G&F to host Kids Fishing Day. Eight long-term monitoring sites were completed.

Surveys of Willet Creek were initiated to develop a design for an Aquatic Organism Passage, road reroute, and possibly stream restoration project. WY G&F has selected Willet Creek for one its next sites to pursue a YCT reintroduction. This project is in its early phase.



Fire and Fuels

Highlights in the fire and fuels programs include 200 acres of Wildland-Urban Interface (WUI) fuels thinning near Big Goose summer homes. This project is part of the Sheridan Municipal Watershed and was to begin reducing fuels.

The Quill and Porcupine Stewardship timber sales treated approximately 300 acres of WUI fuels near the Porcupine summer homes and High Country Lodge.

The Buffalo Municipal Watershed project included a Good Neighbor Agreement with Wyoming State Forestry to treat 125 acres of aspen. Grants were awarded to support this effort from the Wyoming Wildlife Natural Resources Trust Fund, Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation, and the Nature Conservancy. The Grommund Creek timber sale was awarded for 200 acres of fuels reductions, along with approximately 400 acres of hand thinning and piling for fuels reduction in key areas.



Dispersed Camping Task Force

A Dispersed Camping Task Force comprised of community members representing each of the four counties surrounding the forest was initiated early in 2019. Issues were identified and solutions were discussed. A final recommendation is expected from the task force by the end of the calendar year. The Forest Service will take the recommendations and make decisions and possibly changes to the way the program is managed.



Issues identified by the group:

- Camping opportunities
- Enforcement
- Funding for enforcement, education, and restoration
- Impacts to resources
- Education

Timber Accomplishments



Johnson Creek, Bitmore Reoffer, and Babione timber sales were completed in 2019. Quill, Porcupine, South Tongue, Grommond, Caribou, Billie Jean Timber sales are planned to be operated on 2020. The timber target is 17,000 Ccf for 2020.



Johnson County Weed Bounty and Weed Pull

The Powder River Ranger District participated in the Johnson County Weed Bounty program, which recently concluded the weed pulling portion for the 2019 season. A total of roughly 3,350 pounds of noxious weeds were pulled, eliminating approximately 50 million seeds from spreading more noxious weeds.



Along with the pulled weeds, two new locations of Ventenata grass were found and treated in Johnson County.

Tongue River Cave Bat Maternity Roost Protection, Graffiti Removal, and Wildlife Projects

Wildlife managers collaborated with local cave grottos (cave explorer organizations associated with the National Speleological Society), Wyoming Wilderness Association, and the Wyoming Game and Fish Department on cleaning litter from Tongue River Cave, graffiti removal, and the installation of a gate. The cave remains closed after a maternity roost of Townsend big-eared bats was discovered in August 2019.



Bear-proof food storage lockers and dumpsters in were installed in campgrounds on the Tongue Ranger District, along with a bear aware public education campaign. Managers plan to install ten more food storage lockers across the forest in 2020.

Tensleep Canyon Climbing Management

The Bighorn hired its first climbing ranger in 2019 to better assess the climbing situation, make a presence in the canyon, and to make public contacts with climbers. The forest also initiated a climbing management plan. A well attended Congressional field trip was hosted by the forest. BLM, forest employees, and



congressional staff hiked to first-hand observe impacts at Valhalla and other climbing areas in the canyon. The forest continues to partner with the Bighorn Climber's Coalition to collect data on heritage resources, user-created trails, and human waste management in Tensleep Canyon.



WY Gateway Communities Priority Trails Project- Gilead

The Wyoming Conservation Corps (WCC) completed work on a segment of the Gilead Project Area, part of the Wyoming Gateway Communities Project, which is one of 15 National Trails Stewardship Priority areas. The WCC repaired a wash out and conducted basic maintenance on approximately 1 mile on the South Rock Creek trail 041.



Before

After

Bucking Mule Falls Bridge Restoration Project

The Bighorn NF partnered with the Shoshone NF, Nebraska NF, Back Country Horsemen and the Montana Conservation Corps (MCC) to complete the restoration of the three bridges on the Bucking Mule Falls National Recreation trail. The pack string from the Shoshone NF, along with an employee from the Nebraska NF, worked closely with engineering, trails, and range crews to successfully pack in over 11,000 pounds of bridge timbers. The Back Country Horsemen packed nearly 500 pounds of tools and equipment for the MCC to complete the bridge work. Trail, range, and wilderness crew members provided support to the MCC by packing in camp equipment, food, and additional supplies along with moving supplies as the crew completed each bridge. The total cost of the project was slightly over \$40,000, compared to the unsuccessful contractor's bids that came in between \$195,000- \$245,000



Range Conservationists visit Kyrgyz Republic



This mission was organized by the Forest Service International Programs office in support of the Forest Service's Strategic Goal of "Applying Knowledge Globally" (Goal #3). This is the fourth year of Forest Service participation on this project.

Recently, a team of two Forest Service range managers spent 10 days in the Kyrgyz Republic working with local livestock producers to improve grazing practices on State Forest Fund (SFF) lands (similar to national forests in the United States). This team included Zach Palm, Tongue District Range Conservationist.

This has been accomplished through a combination of field visits and educational workshops with the local grazers and land managers.

The benefits and applicability of the methods and principles shared were adapted to the local environment and have been well-received and often applied beyond SFF lands.

In addition to the technical aspect of this mission, International Programs also emphasizes an exchange of cultural knowledge. Horses are very prominent in Kyrgyz culture and the Forest Service team spent a lot of time talking about horses. We also compared the structure of our government; the locals were very interested in how the Forest Service organization is structured and funded.

VOLUNTEERS AND PARTNERS

Strong community relationships, partnerships, and collaborative work are more important now than ever. Many individuals and groups work in partnership with us to make a difference in sustaining the forest's resources. We rely on these strong, collaborative relationships to help accomplish our work.

In 2019, volunteers provided over 7,963 hours of labor valued at \$202,521 for a variety of recreation, heritage, and trails projects.

Overall, the Bighorn has entered into 44 partnership agreements with local community groups, state agencies, and national organizations. The estimated dollar value of these partnerships is \$840,054.



COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS

Bighorn National Forest employees are dedicated to public service. Every year we compile a report that summarizes the year's achievements in helping people in local communities appreciate and understand the value of the national forest and to learn more about public land management.

In 2019, employees made presentations at elementary and high schools, day care facilities, all manner of club meetings, Sheridan College, the YMCA, and an assisted living facility. Wildlife biologists, firefighters, timber foresters, Smokey Bear, and specialists in recreation and range management provided information and education to 2,527 children and 1,862 adults. Presentations ranged from forest management, history of tie hacks, and plant identification.

In addition to outreach, larger numbers of people are reached through interpretation and education efforts at Shell Falls Interpretive Site and the Medicine Wheel /Medicine Mountain National Historic Landmark.

Fire managers met with people in local communities and coordinated with other fire entities to prepare for fire emergencies and assist with training.



We're always interested . . .

. . . in your thoughts and concerns about the Bighorn's programs and activities, so feel free to stop by, give us a call, or send an email to bighorninfo@fs.fed.us.

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Are you interested in working in the great outdoors? The Forest Service offers a variety of job opportunities—both paid and unpaid—ranging from student and volunteer programs to full-time employment for men and women with skills in many areas. To find out more, visit the Forest Service website at www.fs.fed.us/working-with-us/jobs.

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